The Builder.

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EVERY one has heard of St. Stephen's, Walbrook. Foreigners and provincialists know it as one of the best of Wren's many works, and Londoners, who never find time to look at any thing close to them, as the site of long continued parochial strife and disputes. It is of one of the results of these distressing and discreditable squabbles, that we would speak to-day.

St. Stephen's, Walbrook, is one of the architectural boasts of London. Hear what Ralph says: "It is famous all over Europe, and justly reputed the master-piece of Sir Christopher Wren. Perhaps Italy itself can produce no modern building that can vie with this in taste or proportion: there is not a beauty which the plan would admit of, that is not to be found here in its greatest perfection; and foreigners very justly call our judgment in question for understanding its graces no better, and allowing it no higher a degree of fame." A modern writer, whose opinion is worth more than Ralph's, clinches this by saying,—"Compared with any other of nearly the same magnitude, Italy cannot exhibit its equal; elsewhere its rival is not to be found. Of those worthy notice, the Zitelle, at Venice (by Palladio), is the nearest approximation in regard to size, but it ranks far below our church in point of composition, and still lower in point of effect." And then again,—"Had its materials and volume been as durable and extensive as those of St. Paul's Cathedral, Sir Christopher Wren had consummated a much more efficient monument to his well-earned fame, than that fabric affords."*

Without going to the full extent of these encomiums, we claim for it the admiration of all who can appreciate harmonious proportions, ingenious arrangement, and great constructive skill; and would have it most religiously preserved and worthily adorned.

This being the case, the sorrow with which we heard of the melancholy state of dilapidation into which the church had been allowed to fall, may be supposed,—the regret with which we heard a statement on the subject made by the rector, the Rev. Dr. Croly, to the open vestry of this unfortunate parish.

"As to the melancholy state of the parish church," said the reverend gentleman, "you require no knowledge from me. Like the often-quoted inscription on the grave of Wren, 'If you desire to see his monument, look round you:' if you desire to see the result of the parish difficulties, you have only to look at the stained roof and broken-up floor, at the shaking casements and beggared furniture of a church which was once the pride of our city, and built expressly to remain as a memorial of the genius of one of the noblest architectural names of England. It is now four years since I said in your vestry, that this church was 'not fit for divine service.' I now say that it is less fit, if possible, than before. It is true, that it has not yet fallen upon the congregation; it is true, that the question is not yet decided, whether the floor is to burst up or the roof to come down. Fortunately, the fabric was the work of better times; for if it had been one of our modern performances, the problem would have been solved long since by its ruins. I repeat that, though the church may stand, it is still not the fitter for its sacred purpose. In the city our church is called the 'Walbrook ice-house.' It has been proposed, when the congregation shall all have been frozen away, to make it a colossal barometer, from its indicating every vicissitude of the elements with the most immediate sensibility. By others, the idea of a rain gauge, on the largest possible scale, has been suggested, from its letting down every shower through its cupola. I have seen people thus involuntarily irrigated within a few feet of the pulpit. It was but two Sundays ago, when fires were forbidden us, that the *planking*, which is the novel substitute for glass in one of our east windows, was taken down, I know not by whom, and the frosty air rushed in in a gale. Gentlemen, I say that this is a scandalous state for any sacred edifice to be left in, and that it is a scandal to the city and to the establishment—nay, to the country."

Since this we have sought for an opportunity to visit the structure and judge for ourselves, and last Sunday succeeded in doing so. We travelled to the Mansion House, where, as a rhymer on "Modern Castles" says,—

> "Behind proud Dance's palace, in disgrace,
> Retiring Walbrook hides her blushing face."

and after listening to an eloquent and instructive discourse from the rector, looked round the church.

We found the statement already quoted was in no respect over-coloured; and we echo the assertion that the state of this church is a scandal to the city, and to the establishment,—nay, to the country. The glass is broken, the walls are filthily dirty, and the cupola and ceilings stained and injured, by the entry of water for several years past through the lead which covers them, leading to the belief that much of the timber-work will be found rotten when properly examined.

The prevention of further evil through this cause, and the restitution of the parts already injured, are the first steps that should be taken, and ought not to be delayed a week longer than can be avoided. The rest of the fabric should then be generally repaired, and decorated in a style worthy of the building. If the parish cannot do it, London ought, and if London will not, it is the duty of all England to assist. St. Stephen's, Walbrook, belongs to the nation.

We have been asked by several persons to say in what manner this building should be decorated, but think it would be scarcely right to do so now. If it belonged to our neighbours, the French, the columns would be polished, the walls would be covered with paintings in fresco or encaustic, the cupola and ceilings would glow with colours and gilding, varied marbles would form the pavement, and the windows be filled with stained glass. It would be one of the glories of the capital, and an added inducement to strangers of all nations to resort there.

In moderation, the same course should be adopted here, and the corporation of London, and the legislature, might be fairly called upon to aid by a grant so good an object.

It has been suggested by some who frequent the church, that the ugly oval lights (of which there are a dozen) in the walls of the church, should be closed, the light being at times so great as to distract the eye, and that the recesses should be made to receive busts of the apostles. The introduction of painted glass would, perhaps, be preferable, as it would remedy the evil complained of without endangering the effect of the structure. The pewing should also be re-arranged; but, as we said before, we will not now enter into details: our present object is to draw attention to the miserable state of the building, and to claim for it immediate reparation, and ultimately, worthy adornment.*

* Gwilt in Britton's "Public Buildings of London."

† A beautiful engraving of the interior of the church will be found in "Londina Illustrata."

* See p. 257.

THE BUILDINGS ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

BUILDERS, district surveyors, and the public, have alike felt it necessary to object to portions of the Bill now before the House, and of which we recently gave an abstract.† Committees appointed by the District Surveyors Association, the Builders' Society, and the Society of Master Carpenters, have reported on it and transmitted their views to the Commissioners of Woods. A deputation of the two latter bodies, consisting of Mr. William Cubitt, Mr. Grimsdell, and Mr. Thomas Piper (of the Builders' Society), and Mr. H. Biers, and Mr. J. Stephens (of the Carpenters'), had an interview with Lord Morpeth on the subject last week. The deputation was introduced by Colonel Wood, who seems to be the only metropolitan member that has taken much interest in the matter. Mr. Hawes, the present under secretary for the colonies, was of course precluded by his official position from any interference, but on the former occasion, when the first bill was introduced, he gave the matter most patient consideration, and watched the measure through the House with much though unsuccessful vigilance. The deputation were received with the greatest attention, and their various suggestions were discussed and considered at length. Mr. Philips, at Lord Morpeth's desire, was present, and the interview lasted one hour-and-a-half. The points chiefly insisted upon were:—1st. The new authority proposed by clause VII., to be vested in district surveyors, and which in ordinary buildings it was felt would be in the highest degree objectionable; and, 2ndly, that the awards of the official referees should be subject to appeal.‡

Mr. H. Biers called the attention of his lordship to an award by the official referees, which, if insisted upon, would be a great hardship upon almost every dwelling of every rate, but most especially to the smaller description of buildings. He read from THE BUILDER a report of this award, in which the official referees stated, that all additional buildings attached to the back front of any dwelling, if *above* the basement story, must not have any internal communication, although in the same occupation; in point of fact, that to make use of an office building on or above the ground floor, you must first go into the back-yard of your own premises, otherwise, if there is to be an internal communication from the staircase or back parlour, that then this addition must be measured as to area, and included in the area of the main building. This would so diminish the area of the respective rates, that the new bill would very considerably curtail the superficial area limiting the rates: so that instead of having had an increase in superficial quantity in the present bill, as compared with the old Buildings Act, it would much diminish even the limited area under its provisions, and defeat the object of the legislature and of every one who had at all promoted a larger space in the respective rates. The award would also deprive the public of the boon they considered they had obtained, in the walls of the additional buildings being of a thickness *pro rata* with the attached building; ITSELF, and unconnected as regards thickness of walls with the main building.

His lordship gave the deputation to understand, that this was not to be considered a

‡ "Clauses XII. and XIII. refer to the award of the official referees persons that will carry everything before it, making it put under all the existing authorities of the land, and supersede the courts of law and this without appeal; giving power to destroy and remove deficient buildings, and the memorials and of the proprietors of that may do and meet the extreme grade of injury or the land itself for all the arrears.

This clauses gives more power than ought to be in any individual, and there certainly should be some appeal. The verdict or award will of course find its legal value in due time in the various courts of law and equity, and it seems hardly credible that this great power should be given to it by Act of Parliament."